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Planning and Creating Your Blog

First, think carefully about what you want to say and what information you want to communicate via your blog. Make sure you have enough content to share over the long term, and will be able to regularly update your blog with fresh, engaging, and relevant content.

Next, consider who your target audience will be. Then, figure out the best way to convey your information to your audience, and determine if you'll primarily use text, photos, video, audio, computer graphics, and/or other multimedia content.

Think about how much technological knowledge you have, and how much time and money you want to invest in developing and producing your content. Once you've considered all of these important elements, you'll be in a much better position to begin planning and creating what will hopefully become a successful blog. Plus, you'll be able to determine which service you'll use to host your blog, and be able to discover effective ways to promote it.

With thousands of new blogs being published each and every day, plus many being taken offline or simply abandoned in cyberspace, it's impossible to calculate an accurate figure as to the number of blogs that actually exist in the blogosphere at any given moment. That being said, let's take a quick look at how many blogs are hosted by some of the internet's most prominent blog-hosting services as of April 2013:

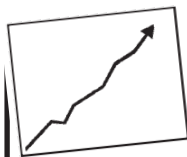
- Tumblr—191.7 million
- Wordpress.com—65 million
- LiveJournal—62.6 million
- Weebly—12 million
- Blogster—583,000
- Blogger.com—1.2 billion

There are also many more mainstream blogging and online social networking services that host blogs, vlogs, and podcasts, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Vimeo, Vine, Pinterest, and Instagram, so the actual number of blogs available right now on the internet is well into the multi-billions.

One of the reasons why blogging has become so incredibly popular as a

communications medium is because anyone can do it, and the startup costs are minimal. Using a blog, creative and charismatic people are able to bypass the usual corporate content publishers—such as magazines, newspapers, music record labels, TV networks, and radio stations—and deliver content directly to their audiences via the web.

If you haven't allowed yourself to wander beyond your usual favorite websites, you'll be surprised to find that the number



Stat Fact

According to WordPress.com, it hosts more than 65 million blogs. More than 500,000 new posts are added to these blogs daily, and they're read by more than 329 million people per month. These people generate in excess of 25 billion page views per month.

of online journals, photo albums, music galleries, artist portfolios, and other personal sites have exploded in number. Plus, you can find blogs, vlogs, and podcasts that cover every topic imaginable. As a result, new and original content is flooding the web, which has resulted in a true online renaissance.

This book will help you understand the significance of the blogging phenomenon, and more importantly, show you how people from around the world are using blogging to circumvent commonly accepted publishing procedures, and keep the profits generated from their own work, while also maintaining 100 percent creative control over their content.

The material presented within this book is designed around a five-step process. These steps include:

Step 1: Planning your blog

Step 2: Publishing your blog

Step 3: Managing your blog

Step 4: Promoting your blog

Step 5: Profiting or otherwise benefitting from your blog

Several chapters of this book detail what's involved in each step of the overall blogging process. Keep in mind, these steps are equally important and must be given proper time and consideration. Also, some of the steps required will vary based on

“Engagement” Is All About Getting People Involved with Your Blog

One buzzword that's used often these days is *engagement*. It refers not just to the quality of content that's published online, but also to the level of interaction that the content generates from its audience. For example, a blog would be considered to have a high level of engagement if those who read it also post their own comments and/or share blog posts with their other online friends via Facebook or Twitter.

So, as you're developing your blog and creating content, think in terms of how to make it highly engaging so that you can develop an interactive online community around your content. This will help you retain your existing audience and continuously expand the number of people who read your blog.

the type of blog you plan to create. For example, the steps involved in creating and publishing a text-based blog are different from what's involved in producing a vlog or podcast.

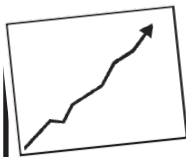
The urge to publish your work can be hard to resist, and once you get started as a blogger, you'll discover the process is fun, rewarding, and also addicting. However, you don't want to rush the process, especially the early planning stages. Once you decide to create a blog, the next step is to come up with an amazing topic to write about—one that will allow you to keep creating new, interesting, engaging, and innovative content (blog entries) on an ongoing basis.

Once you've chosen your topic, it's important to develop an overall goal for your blog. You must truly understand the blog's purpose and what you want to get out of it. At the same time, you need to clearly define your blog's target audience, then develop content that caters specifically to that audience. All this needs to be part of your blog planning process, but more on that later.

As with any business, success is impossible without a solid foundation. Take your time with each and every step. Do your research, and think about the long-term ramifications of everything you do. At the same time, keep considering your overall blogging objectives, and make sure your actions will help you achieve them.

While there's no limit to how much money you can earn running a successful and popular blog, it's important to have realistic expectations. Chances are, you won't become a millionaire, and blogging isn't a get-rich-quick scheme. Truly successful bloggers often use their blog as a way to better communicate with customers and clients, or as a sales and marketing tool for their businesses. It's not created to generate revenue on its own.

If you're creating a blog as a business venture with hopes it will generate profits, this requires a lot of planning and promotion, because you'll need to build and maintain an extremely large and dedicated following for the blog before it will generate any serious revenue.



Stat Fact

As of early 2013, more than 60 percent of all businesses maintain some type of blog.

In fact, self-publishing and self-promoting any type of work can be a bit of a challenge. While it won't cost you a fortune to create and publish a successful blog that generates revenue, it will require that you put in serious work—not just creating, publishing, managing, and promoting the blog, but also overseeing the business side of the online venture as well.

Smart Tip

If you're launching a blog as a standalone business, you'll need to establish your business entity properly from the start. File the appropriate paperwork, set up bank accounts, and lay the foundation for the business's infrastructure accordingly.

Tip...

Once your blog begins generating revenue, either from your audience or advertisers, you'll need to handle the same business-related tasks as you would for any type of business, such as bookkeeping and paying taxes. In later chapters, we'll focus on specific ways to generate revenue with your blog and how to transform it into a profit-generating venue (as opposed to a nonpaying hobby).

Before you start calculating all the riches you'll be earning as a blogger, let's spend a few minutes exploring what a blog, vlog, podcast, and microblog actually are. After all, you need to determine if this is what you want to do, what approach you want to take, and whether you have the wherewithal to do it right.

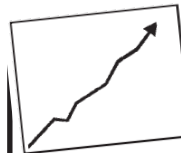
What Is a Blog?

The term “blog” comes from combining the words “web” and “log,” which was used for a short time to describe websites that published a running archive of dated entries, sort of like a digital diary that was displayed in chronological order. The techno-geeks that created the first “web logs” coined the term “weblog,” which ultimately evolved into the term “blog.”

The word “blog,” as a noun, can describe a regularly updated, primarily text-based website with individual, dated posts that are displayed chronologically. This is a traditional blog. Of course, today's traditional blogs can also incorporate photos, videos, audio, and graphics, but they're primarily text-based, and use a standard format for each entry.

The word can also be used as a verb, as in “to blog,” meaning to actively submit posts to a website, which is also referred to as “blogging.” The people who run blogs are known as “bloggers,” and the whole collection of all the internet's blogs is known as the “blogosphere.”

The anatomy of a traditional, text-based blog is nothing more than a basic

**Stat Fact**

According to Worldmeters (www.worldometers.info/blogs), the total number of individual blog posts created and published per day is more than 1.8 million.

website with a bunch of dated entries. All of the blogging services that host blogs allow bloggers to customize the look of their blog, by choosing text colors, fonts, and an overall layout or design. Many use professionally created templates that can be fully customized but that require no programming to use.

Beyond traditional blogs, there are also vlogs, podcasts, and microblogs. A vlog is a collection of videos, recorded and edited by the vlogger. Instead of using text, the vlogger stars in their own videos, and often simply looks into the camera and talks to their audience. You'll find many popular vloggers on YouTube. Some have become popular internet personalities with huge followings.

Thanks to Twitter, and services like Facebook and Google+, millions of people have gotten hooked on microblogging. Instead of writing lots of text for a traditional blog, or recording videos for a vlog, they simply update their microblog feed with ongoing entries which are no longer than 140 characters in length (about one sentence long).

Meanwhile, for people who don't like to write, services like Instagram allow people to upload images and include an optional text-based caption, keywords, and location to a photo.

For obvious reasons, microblogging is the easiest to do and requires the least amount of time and effort. Yet there are microbloggers with millions of followers who use their Twitter feed, for example, to promote their company, products, services, or themselves very successfully.

Many individuals as well as companies often use a combination of online activities to achieve their goals. For example, they'd use a blog to promote a company, product, or service's website, and then use a Twitter feed and/or a Facebook page to promote the blog and/or the website. YouTube videos can also be used to cross-promote a website, blog, Facebook page, and/or Twitter feed. Thus, the same core content and message is repackaged in several ways, across multiple platforms, to reach a broader audience using different forms of media.

For the remainder of this book, blogging will be a catch-all phrase that could include traditional blogging, vlogging, podcasting, and/or microblogging. As you'll discover, the most successful blogs focus on a single topic or have a specific purpose, and their content caters to a specific and well-defined audience. You'll also find as you explore the blogosphere that people from all walks of life start blogs for vastly different reasons and with many different goals in mind.

There are no limits as to what topic can be covered within a blog. You can convey thoughts, ideas, facts, or opinions. You can also offer how-to information, share your expertise, spread gossip, or promote a person, company, product, or service. Some blogs are created just for fun—to make people laugh or to share information with friends and immediate family.

There are also a lot of blogs on the internet that are about the internet. These blogs cover topics such as how to build websites, what technologies to try, and what up-and-coming trends to watch. These bloggers alert their audience to exciting news by keeping a constant finger on the pulse of a particular industry, and provide a valuable service.

Companies from virtually every industry regularly use blogs for a wide range of purposes, including:

- To build brand awareness for a person, product, service, or company
- To distribute company, industry, or product-oriented news and information
- To enhance a company's overall customer service and interaction with clients and customers (as well as prospective ones)
- To offer a forum for providing technical support
- To educate customers (or potential customers) about the company, its products, and/or its services
- To entertain customers or build a community around a brand
- As a powerful marketing, promotional, or public relations tool
- To encourage customers to communicate among themselves about a specific topic (such as a company's product)
- To showcase and compare a specific product with competing products
- To teach people about how to use a product or service, or instruct them on how to acquire a new skill

The possibilities are truly limitless, whether you're blogging, vlogging, podcasting, or microblogging.

Not all blogs provide a valuable service. There are plenty of blogs out there that feature content that's totally incoherent, rambles, and features un-entertaining rants about whatever is on the blogger's mind. In fact, as you start reading blogs, you'll find many where the blogger actually blogs about not having anything to blog about.

This meaningless type of blog has no audience beyond the blogger's immediate friends, co-workers, and relatives (if even those people are interested). You should be certain that your blog, and your chosen



Beware!

A blog can be about anything, but to be successful, a blog must provide a valuable and tangible service or benefit to its readers. The content you create needs to be informative, entertaining, unique, creative, and/or engaging—something people want to read or watch. It also needs to be consistent. Blogs that aren't well focused find it very difficult to find and then retain an audience.

topic, provide valuable and informative content. After all, if you're able to provide valuable and reliable content of any kind, you'll develop an audience, and that audience can keep growing.

Blogging is a fast-growing phenomenon. As blogging becomes even more mainstream and widespread, so does your potential audience. Blogs can be accessed from a desktop or notebook computer, any wireless internet device, an interactive TV set, a tablet (such as the iPad), or even a smartphone. So as more individuals, companies, and organizations use blogs to communicate, more people will devote their time to reading blogs, listening to podcasts, and watching vlogs that interest them.

Without a doubt, blogging will continue to become more popular and evolve in the next few years. It's not too late to jump on the bandwagon and become a successful blogger, podcaster, or vlogger. Even if you can't come up with something truly unique to blog about, you can still develop a new twist to present your content and take a new approach when it comes to presenting it to your targeted audience.

With your enthusiasm to explore the world of professional blogging, and the tools and information provided in the following chapters, you'll potentially be able to earn money running a blog. The amount of money you earn will be up to you.

Keep in mind, many companies currently use a blog as a sales, marketing, promotional, or advertising tool, and/or to enhance their customer service or technical support. The blog is not designed to directly generate revenue, but it is designed to help a company grow, cut costs, and assist in building lasting relationships with potential and existing customers or clients, for example.

It All Starts with a Great Idea

As you already know, one of the first steps for launching a successful blog is the planning phase. Just as you wouldn't launch a company without a detailed business plan, you don't want to simply create a blog without a plan, especially if you're hoping to generate revenue from it or use the blog in conjunction with your existing business.

This section covers the things you'll need to anticipate and the preparations you'll want to make before ever touching your keyboard to create your first blog entry.

A successful blog must have four main features:

1. A steady stream of original, interesting, informative, engaging, and/or entertaining content. The content should be targeted to its audience and displayed or presented in a way that's easy to read and visually appealing.
2. A large and ever-growing audience

3. One or more reliable revenue sources (if the goal of the blog is, in fact, to generate revenue)
4. It should be synergistic with all of your other online activities, including what you do via your website, Facebook page, Twitter feed, and/or YouTube channel, etc.

Choosing a Profitable Topic

There are many factors to consider when selecting a topic that will produce desirable profits or allow you to build a large and dedicated audience. You must consider public interest, your knowledge of the topic, its longevity, and the audience's interest in it. It's also important to look at your competition and develop a way to deliver content that's different, better, and more engaging than your competition. Start off by brainstorming several possible topics you might like to use, then consider the following:

- Who's the audience for the topic? As the blogger, will you be able to cater to that audience and write or produce content in a way the audience will relate to?

A Podcast Allows You to Be Heard

A “podcast” is an audio-based blog. It allows the blogger to record their voice, as well as audio content, and provide it in a blog-like format that people download or stream from the internet and then listen to on demand, as opposed to reading or watching it. Before vlogging became so popular and readily available, thanks to low-cost webcams, YouTube, and high-speed internet connections, podcasting was popular. These days, podcasting is less popular but still a viable way to communicate using audio with an audience.

Think of a podcast as an on-demand radio show that you produce and distribute to your audience. Someone can then listen to a podcast on their computer, tablet, or smartphone, or download the audio file and listen to it at their convenience using a digital music player (such as an iPod).

A podcaster can create new podcasts (audio programs) on a daily, weekly, biweekly, or monthly basis, to which a listener can subscribe for free and then enjoy at their leisure.

- Does the topic have long-term appeal? Will it be relevant in six months, a year, two years, or five years from now?
- How large is the target audience for the topic? How will you reach the intended audience to inform them about your blog?
- Will there be enough to write about the topic in the future? Off the top of your head, can you write down at least 25 things you'd blog about in future entries? Will you be able to come up with new things to blog about and keep your content fresh over the long term?
- How much competition is there based on your topic? Consider other blogs, websites, magazines, newspapers, newsletters, vlogs, TV shows, radio shows, podcasts, YouTube channels, Facebook pages, and other content that's out there and already targeting your audience.
- What will you do differently to make your content more appealing, engaging, entertaining, or interactive?

If your goal is to attract millions of visitors every month to a blog, the topic you select should have mass appeal or be somewhat mainstream, yet have a unique twist to it. As you try to determine the size of your audience, be realistic and develop appropriate expectations. For example, a blog that addresses the political happenings in your town of 30,000 people may very well become the hottest thing in that town, but the audience growth potential has a ceiling. People in other towns, much less in other states or countries, will have little or no interest in your blog.

Even if you create the most incredible blog and the potential audience is the people in your town, realistically, it's likely that only one out of every 10 people in your town will have the time or interest to read blogs in the course of their day, and of those few people, even fewer are most likely interested in local politics. So while the topic of local politics may excite you personally, the reality is that this topic is very limited in terms of its potential audience and ability to grow.

Bloggers just like you have achieved success blogging about a wide range of topics. The following are just a few general areas that you might consider as you choose what you'll blog about.

Blog Topic Idea List

The following list, presented in alphabetical order, is comprised of 101 proven topics you could blog about. However, this list only scratches the surface when it comes to possible topics, themes, issues, or subject matters to blog about.

For every potential blogging topic, you can offer your opinions, experiences, commentary, news, how-to information, or take a variety of different approaches, plus

delve into subtopics or related themes. You can also focus on the controversy that surrounds a topic as a way to engage your audience.

1. Abortion (your opinion/commentary)
2. Abuse (drugs, alcohol, mental, physical, etc.)
3. Airline security
4. Art (favorite/least favorite/your review)
5. Books (favorite/least favorite/your review)
6. Boss-related topics
7. Brothers/sisters
8. Business and financial news
9. Cars
10. Cell phones
11. Challenge your audience to do something specific
12. Charity
13. Collectibles
14. Commentary on someone else's blog
15. Company-related sales and promotions
16. Computers
17. Consumer electronics
18. Cooking
19. Corruption
20. Credit cards and loans
21. Crime
22. Currency exchange rates
23. Debate something with your audience
24. Divorce
25. Dreams or nightmares
26. Economic trends
27. Embarrassing moments
28. Family vacations (best or worst)
29. Fashion
30. Fitness
31. Food/nutrition
32. Friends
33. Gambling
34. Gas prices
35. Gay rights or gay marriage
36. Global warming
37. Government/government policies (local, state, or federal)
38. Hairstyling
39. Health insurance (and other types of insurance)
40. Hobbies (golf, fishing, hiking, camping, crafts, knitting, painting, etc.)
41. Hollywood or show-business gossip
42. Home decorating
43. How-to instruction (share your expertise on a topic)
44. Interview people (experts, commentators, celebrities, politicians, etc.)
45. Investing
46. Iran/Iraq/The Middle East
47. Jewelry
48. Knitting/sewing
49. Loss (financial, family member, friend, etc.)

50. Magazine articles (your commentary)
51. Medical issues
52. Mortgages/refinancing
53. Movies or DVDs (favorite/least favorite/your review)
54. Music (favorite/least favorite/your review)
55. News events/news stories
56. Office politics
57. On-the-job experiences
58. Operating a business
59. Parody something
60. Paying off debt
61. Personal experience(s)
62. Personal finances
63. Personal heroes or role models
64. Pets
65. Political commentary
66. Political election
67. Pop culture
68. Problems or dilemmas (personal or work related)
69. Product/service comparisons
70. Product/service customer testimonials
71. Product/service review(s)
72. Raising children or teenagers
73. Random rants about anything... or nothing
74. Reality TV commentary
75. Recent family event
76. Recycling
77. Religion/your religious views
78. Reveal a secret
79. Reviews of books, TV shows, movies, DVDs, etc.
80. School
81. Self-employment
82. Share research on a topic
83. Shopping
84. Single or married life
85. Social networking
86. Something you hate or that makes you angry
87. Sports
88. Teacher or professor (favorite/least favorite)
89. Technology trends
90. Tell jokes/present comedy
91. Terrorism
92. The United States (or any other country)
93. Theatre (favorite/least favorite/your review)
94. Travel
95. Trials (commentary on the legal system)
96. TV shows (favorite/least favorite/your review)
97. U.S. foreign policy
98. War
99. Websites (favorite/least favorite/your review)
100. Weight loss
101. Yourself—share something personal

If you're operating a blog for a company, the blog itself can focus on your company, its philosophies, and/or the people who run the company, for example. The blog can (and should) be targeted to your potential and/or existing customers or clients.

Consider using a company blog to explain how to best use your product or service (i.e., provide step-by-step how-to information), share customer testimonials, offer product comparisons, and/or interact with your customers in an informal way in order to share new information about products/services on the horizon.

Industry-Oriented Topics

One way to virtually ensure you'll have plenty to blog about, now and in the future, is to focus on a specific industry and blog about that industry as a whole. For example, there's the "entertainment industry," or more specifically, "TV," "music," "movies," or "celebrities." There's also the computer industry, consumer electronics, sports, fashion, mining, transportation, and literally thousands of other potential industries to choose from, provided you have some knowledge about the industry and something to say in your blog.

Within a single industry, there are probably thousands or even tens of thousands or millions of people who work within it. These would be potential audience members for your blog, as would be consumers who benefit from the products or services created by your choice of industries to blog about.

Once you have a general industry or topic, try to narrow it down a bit so the blog will have focus and appeal to a specific group of people. For example, instead of blogging about the entertainment industry, maybe you'll focus on celebrity gossip, or movie, book, or TV reviews, for example. Or you could narrow down things even more, and focus your blog on just sci-fi TV shows, or just a single show/movie franchise, like *Star Trek*, *Iron Man*, or *X-Men*.

The sports industry, for example, would probably be too large of a topic for one person to cover. People interested in NASCAR won't be interested in your bowling

Smart Tip

If you're at a loss for words but have photos that can tell a story, consider creating a photo blog or using a service like Facebook, Google+, Instagram, or Pinterest to share your digital images. Just as with traditional blogs, there are no rules for creating photo blogs and/or online galleries, so you can opt to include a detailed photo caption for each image, or allow each photo to speak for itself. Photos displayed in a pre-determined sequence, for example, can be used to tell a powerful story. It's also possible to publish exactly where and when each photo was taken, and link keywords or tags to each photo, which make it easier for people to find.

Tip...

postings. However, say basketball is your favorite sport. Consider blogging about the NBA. The NBA has millions of fans, and you could produce great traffic by covering the stories that major media passes over—especially if you have a true passion for basketball and some type of expertise you can share. You could opt to focus on college basketball or even regional high school basketball, based on your interest, knowledge, and blog goals.

If you choose to cover the technology industry, you'll quickly find you have some significant competition. Do some research before you launch your blog. Find out what's out there, and discover a way to do it better, or focus on a different niche to cover. There are plenty of niches within the tech industry, or any industry for that matter, that you can choose from and potentially offer a blog with a unique perspective.

As you consider all of the thousands of different industries out there, you'll certainly be able to find at least one that appeals to you and that you'd have an interest in blogging about. If you choose to blog about an industry, much of your time preparing content (blog entries) will be spent searching for industry news, following industry trends, reporting about industry breakthroughs, and discussing industry gossip, for example.

Smart Tip

Blogs about commodity items, such as digital cameras and consumer electronics, for example, provide good advertising options for bloggers and can potentially offer a stable source of advertising revenue.

Tip...



Beware!

If you choose a subject matter that's too narrowly focused, you'll have difficulty finding and maintaining an audience, not to mention coming up with things to blog about on an ongoing basis. Likewise, if the blog's topic is too broad, you won't be able to capture an audience, because what you're blogging about won't appeal to a specific group of people.

Blogs Focusing on an Organization

If you have a connection to, or are employed by, a company that holds national interest, such as eBay, Apple, Nike, AT&T, or Honda, you could do well by simply blogging about the antics in your office (providing you don't reveal any company trade secrets or alienate yourself from your superiors and wind up getting fired). People are always interested to hear about the inner workings of the companies that have reached celebrity status in this country. There are many successful blogs run by folks who capitalize on a company's popularity.



Beware!

Be careful not to reveal sensitive information, or bad-mouth your co-workers or boss within your blog. Remember, blogs are public. Anyone and everyone instantly has access to whatever you publish. Many people have been fired as a result of posting too much sensitive or negative information within a blog that pertains to their employer or superiors at work.

Within days, sometimes mere hours after you publish a blog post, it often becomes searchable via Google, Yahoo!, and other search engines. Thus, someone can enter a keyword that somehow relates to your blog or most recent post and then stumble upon your blog as a result of using an internet search engine.

of their day to read your blog and become a loyal follower.

Posting personal artwork, such as drawings, paintings, or photography, has helped some bloggers not only earn money from art sales and related merchandising, but also gain fans and a dedicated following for their work. Thousands of followers or fans gives you, the artist, added credibility and improves your real-world marketability. A popular art blog, for example, can lead to larger licensing, merchandising, or sponsorship deals.

The same is true for musicians, songwriters, writers, poets, and other creative endeavors. By sharing work online through

Aside from blogging about a company, there are countless organizations, charities, associations, and nonprofit groups that have vast followings that you could potentially blog about.

Personal Blogs Can Generate Huge Followings

Don't discount less specific blog topics, such as humor. Many successful bloggers don't cover one specific topic at all, but rather they cover a variety of topics in an entertaining manner. Think, for example, of Dave Barry's syndicated column. He doesn't restrict his writing to one area of interest. Instead, he writes about anything that flies into his head, but he does so in a unique and humorous way, allowing him to achieve mass appeal. If you're good at making people laugh, go ahead and try your hand at a humor blog. If you can post something that makes people laugh every day, they'll take time out

Tip...

Smart Tip

Once your blog is published, you'll need to promote it to all your social networks. The fastest, easiest, and most cost-effective way to quickly build an audience is to generate positive word-of-mouth about your blog. Encourage your blog's followers to tell their friends about it. Publish a "Share" button or "Share" icons with each blog entry—it's free, easy, and powerful.

a blog, it's possible to build a dedicated fan base or following that can translate into larger audiences at shows, exhibits, concerts, gallery showings, or public readings, for example.

Blog about a Publicity Stunt

Another interesting approach to blogging is to chronicle something remarkable. Think of it as an ongoing publicity stunt. One of the best examples of this is the *Where the Hell Is Matt?* YouTube videos and blog (www.wherethehellismatt.com), an upbeat and heart-warming dance-related series of vlogs and blogs that promote world unity through dance and music. These videos, which are supported by a traditional blog and website, have had more than 50 million views, and generated a blog following in the hundreds of millions. This audience attracted a national sponsorship for Matt's project, which continues to grow and educate people around the world.

Would you like to ride your lawnmower across the nation? Perhaps you would like to try to get a date with a famous celebrity. If this sounds like fun to you, be sure to give yourself a lot of time to ramp up publicity for your stunt before you take off—and start blogging about it every step of the way. Ultimately, you can generate a lot of traffic in the weeks and months leading up to whatever it is you choose to pull off. The thing to consider is what happens after your stunt? How can you continue to grow your blog and cater to the audience you've developed?

Political Blogs

Political blogs of all persuasions exist in abundance across the internet. In addition to entertainment and technology blogs, topics relating to politics are among the most prevalent in the blogosphere. Everybody has an opinion on the matters of the day. Not everybody, however, has an informed and insightful opinion, or an interesting way to communicate their opinions, thoughts, and ideas in a blog format.

If you would like to run a political blog, but not assert your personal opinion, you could consider using your blog as a filter to help readers wade through all the political spin. But, unless you offer something different or unique, there's no reason for people to access your blog and keep returning to it day after day or week after week.

Dollar Stretcher



If you'd like to test the feasibility of a topic before you commit to it, use a free blogging service (such as Blogger.com or Wordpress.com) to minimize your initial financial risk and investment. Post a few blog entries, and see how well it's accepted by your potential audience.

Blogs Based on Hobbies or Special Interests

Many people have achieved incredible success as bloggers simply by choosing a topic they were already passionate about—their hobby. In the blogosphere, you'll find entertaining, informative, gossipy, and how-to blogs about all sorts of hobbies, from fishing and boating to knitting, sewing, collecting, and gardening.

People are also successfully blogging about cooking, home decorating, yoga, travel, reading, photography, painting, music, fashion, shopping, and countless other special interest areas that thousands of millions of other people also have an interest in.

The trick for these types of blogs is to find a niche that you know about and are interested in, and then share your unique knowledge and perspective about that topic. You'll find companies that sell products or services related to your hobby could be your potential advertisers.

Dollar Stretcher



You can create a specialized Facebook page, for free. To do this, visit www.facebook.com/pages/create and then choose what type of page you want to create. You can create a personal Facebook page, or a specialized page for a local business or place; a company, organization, or institution; a brand or product; an artist, band, or public figure; a page that's entertainment-oriented; or that is somehow related to a cause or community. Once you create a Facebook page, you can tap Facebook's vast global audience to attract an audience for your content using a variety of free and fee-based tools offered directly by Facebook.

A Company Blog

As you learned earlier, more than 60 percent of all companies now utilize some type of blog. If your company hasn't yet begun to capitalize on this inexpensive, yet powerful way to communicate with potential and existing customers and clients, chances are, it probably should.

A company blog can be used in conjunction with a website, Facebook page, and/or Twitter feed for example. It can provide a forum to informally share information and be used as a powerful tool to help personify a business.

At the same time, a company blog can be used to disseminate many different types of information, incorporate elements of a newsletter, or be used to help build an interactive community in which customers or clients who read the blog can post comments, ask questions, and interact freely with company executives and/or other customers or clients in a controlled environment.

In addition to sharing news and information about a company through a blog, it can be used effectively to:

- Tell your company's story
- Introduce readers to a company's leaders using interviews, detailed profiles, and photos
- Provide a behind-the-scenes look at the company's operations or a tour of a manufacturing facility
- Share the company's philosophy
- Offer a sneak peek at future products or services
- Provide how-to information about using a company's products/services (supplementing a user's manual or installation guide, for example)
- Compare a company's products to what the competition offers
- Announce exclusive sales or incentives for existing customers
- Tell customers or clients about a contest or promotion
- Allow customers to share testimonials
- Share details about an upcoming event the company will be participating in, or show highlights from recent events, tradeshow, or seminars
- Talk about charities the company is involved with or how it's giving back to the community
- Discuss what the company is doing to be green and remain environmentally friendly
- Answer questions posed by your potential and existing customers or clients

Any information you want to share that doesn't fit into your existing company's website can be shared using a blog. While a website might be written using a more formal writing style and convey a strong sales message, most blogs can and should be written in an informal, conversational style and utilize more of a soft-sell approach with subtle sales messages combined with information, as well as entertaining and/or engaging information the target audience will find useful.

General Interest Blogs

Don't limit yourself to the topic areas discussed thus far. There are thousands of possibilities that have yet to be explored. You never know what will catch on or spark

Smart Tip

If you ultimately become a skilled and experienced blogger, you can generate revenue by offering your services to companies on a freelance basis as a blog writer or blog manager.

Tip...

the interest of millions of people, especially at the wildfire pace that word-of-mouth can travel across the internet. If you have a crazy idea that might just work, go ahead and give it a shot.

Continuous Stream of Content

When choosing what to blog about, remember to choose an overall topic that won't dry up. Public interest is fickle and rarely stays on one topic for very long. So be sure to choose a topic that has held public interest (or the interest of your target audience) for a long time and will continue to do so in the future.

For example, the Winter Olympics is an event that sends the whole world rushing to media outlets for the latest news, and a blog seems perfectly suited to provide up-to-the-minute updates and compelling stories about the competitors. But what do you cover after the closing ceremonies, and then for the next three years? Your blog could easily sit dormant and unprofitable when the public's interest moves on.

No one can control public interest. People can only influence public interest and trends, both of which can be somewhat predictable. Examine trends in the past, stick to reliable topics, and don't select a subject so esoteric that you limit your audience as you choose the focus on your blog.

As you develop your content, keep in mind that the attention span of your audience is very short. For text-based blogs, keep your postings short. Likewise, a video published within a blog or on YouTube, for example, should be kept to between three and five minutes in length.

Smart Tip

When creating content for a traditional blog, also keep your readers' short attention spans in mind. Get your main points or message across in five minutes or less.

Tip...

If you have a topic that requires a vast amount of text or a long video to explain, for example, consider dividing up that content into a series of short blog posts or videos.

Your Credibility as a Blogger

You must have, or develop, a better-than-average familiarity with your chosen topic if you want readers to take you seriously. Readers won't stick around to read things they already know or that they deem irrelevant or uninteresting.

Therefore, you shouldn't choose a topic that you know little or nothing about. Chances are, if you know nothing about the topic you select now, you don't have too much interest in the subject. Ideally, you want to be absolutely passionate about

whatever it is you blog about since that passion will come across to your audience. Plus, in the weeks and months to come, if you have a passion for your blogging topic, you'll enjoy the whole blogging process that much more.

If you can't honestly call yourself an expert in the topic you choose, get up to speed quickly by reading books, magazines, newspapers, and other blogs. To establish credibility, you'll want to choose a topic that isn't so large that your expertise doesn't seem plausible.

Few people will ever be considered experts on the gigantic topic of "sports," but it's certainly possible for you to be considered an expert on the NBA. Likewise, it's doubtful that any one person will be considered an expert on "animals." It's more believable that someone is an expert on "training dogs." Choose a topic of manageable size and that can be used to enhance your credibility.

Existing Competition

Before you take on all of your competition in cyberspace, find out who that competition is and how much of it actually exists. You'll do yourself a disservice by entering a topic area that's already chock-full of bloggers, unless you've developed a unique approach.

Similarly, taking on established industry experts can be prohibitively difficult, unless your qualifications are top-notch, and again, you have a different approach to creating your content. You shouldn't completely disregard your chosen topic if you find that it's crowded or well-covered. While that may be what you end up doing, you should consider adjusting your tactics first.

If your preferred topic is crowded, readership for that type of content may already be spread too thin across too many blogs (and other media outlets), thereby leaving all the blogs with little traffic or profit potential.

As you study your competition, take detailed notes in regard to how and where other people are succeeding and where they're falling behind. Learn specifically what works (in terms of your blog topic and its target audience) and improve upon or fix what doesn't. In other words, learn from your competitors' mistakes and don't try to reinvent the wheel.

If you're able to formulate a new approach to a topic or cover it in a new and

Smart Tip

The blogosphere may seem crowded on first glance, but every topic has countless unexplored niches. Plus, using your creativity, you can take a different approach to a topic that nobody else has done. Do your homework to find what works best for you, based on your experience, knowledge, passion, interests, and education.

Tip...

entertaining and/or informative manner, chances are you'll be able to attract sufficient traffic for your blog. And, as you'll learn, with massive traffic comes greater revenue generation potential.

Your Interest and Passion

Before committing yourself to one particular topic, realize that whatever topic you choose will become the focal point of your everyday blogging life. Your interest and passion for the topic should be strong enough to sustain you through the times when you aren't sure you can bring yourself to read another article on the subject, much less write another compelling blog entry.

Consider this carefully and objectively. You don't want to be stuck with a blog you can't stand, and ultimately, a job that you hate or resent. Remember, you're potentially starting a moneymaking blogging "business," which means taking the project beyond where a mere hobbyist would go.

When people read your blog content, it should become immediately obvious that not only are you an expert on the subject matter but you're also passionate about it. At the same time, it's essential that the blog's readers/viewers feel as if you're committed to them and to meeting all of their needs, wants, and interests as they're related to the topic.

Choose the Best Way to Present Your Content

When you're creating a traditional blog, the primary way you'll present your content is through the written word. However, don't forget you can also easily incorporate photos, graphs, charts, illustrations, animated graphics, digital slides, tables, music, audio, video, and other multimedia content in order to get your point across and convey your information.

Choose the method that best caters to your target audience, keeping in mind its attention span is very short. Then, once you choose the best method for communicating what you have to say, focus on the best way to say it. For example, research shows that people love to read top-10 lists as well as bulleted points that break up information into small chunks, making it easier to understand and digest.

That age-old adage that "a picture is worth a thousand words" is certainly true. Instead of wasting several paragraphs describing something, can you convey the same information using a single digital image, chart, or graph?

Deciding how to best communicate information within your blog is where knowing and understanding your audience, as well as creativity, come into play. While it's always good to incorporate one or more photos into a blog post to break up the

text, only use images that are directly relevant to your content. Avoid unnecessary distractions that will clutter the screen, and of course, make sure you have permission to use whatever photos or artwork you want to feature within your blog so you don't violate anyone else's copyrights or trademarks.

Create a Posting Schedule and Stick to It

Once you commit to becoming a blogger, figure out how often you'll publish new posts, and promote your schedule to your audience. Then, make sure you stick to that schedule. For example, if your audience expects a new blog posting every Monday at 3:00 P.M. (EST), make sure you always publish your latest posting exactly when promised. Failing to adhere to a regular posting schedule will make it very difficult to build and then retain an audience.

Before committing to a schedule, make sure you have enough content to meet that schedule over the long term. If you publish new postings daily, you don't want to run out of fresh ideas after a few weeks or months.

Even if you publish a new post once every two weeks or once a month, that's fine as long as that's what your audience expects, although frequency and consistency will allow you to grow your audience much faster.

Selecting a Blog Name

Selecting a suitable name for your blog is one of the more creative steps as you get started. Your blog's name should be creative, memorable, intriguing, and quickly summarize what your blog is all about and who it's of interest to. It will be how people find and recognize you.

When naming your blog, there are a few guidelines you should follow. First, create a descriptive name that's appropriate for your blog topic. Let's say a blogger named Alex decides to use the simple name of "Alex's Blog." While this title is accurate, it doesn't give readers any indication as to what Alex's blog is all about or who it's of interest to.

A blog's name should tell readers how they'll benefit from reading or viewing the blog. The title of *Alex's Cute Dog Photo Blog*, for example, makes it clear that Alex's blog offers photos of cute dogs. Readers looking to brighten their day by looking at adorable doggy photos will now know this is the perfect blog for them.

Your blog's name should also potentially work nicely as its URL (domain name), which means it should be easy to spell and intuitive for the visitor. For example, if

the blog's title is *Alex's Cute Dog Photo Blog*, some URLs you might consider registering are AlexsCuteDogPhotoBlog.com, CuteDogPhotos.com, or some easy-to-remember derivative of the blog's main title.

Another example is the blog *Jason Rich's Featured App of the Week*. This blog focuses on new and innovative Apple iPhone and iPad apps that can help someone become more productive using their iOS mobile device. The custom URL for this blog is www.FeaturedAppOfTheWeek.com, while the URL assigned to it by WordPress.com is <http://featuredappoftheweek.wordpress.com>.

Smart Tip

Be sure your chosen blog title isn't already in use. This could lead to confusion for your readers and legal problems for you. Do some searches on Google (www.google.com), Technorati (<http://technorati.com/blogs/directory>), IceRocket (www.icerocket.com), or Blog Search Engine (www.blogsearch-engine.com), for example, to see if your proposed blog title is already being used or somehow infringes on a copyright or trademark. Also, be sure to search YouTube.com.

Domain Name Concerns

Keep your site's domain name in mind when naming your blog. Ideally, your blog's name should be your blog's domain name to keep things simple for your readers. Therefore, you should choose a brief and memorable name that works well with ".com" tagged onto the end of it.

Going back to our previous example, if Alex were to name his site *Alex's Archive of Adorable Puppy Photography*, the sheer length of the name could easily overwhelm the constraints of a suitable domain name.

The URL, www.alexarchiveofadorablepuppyphotography.com, isn't exactly easy to type, let alone remember. Shortening the name to CuteDogBlog.com would work better. This URL is memorable, brief, easy to spell, and appropriate for the subject matter.

Whatever you end up choosing, expect it to be permanent. Changing the name of your blog down the road will not only confuse your readers and harm your established brand credibility, but it will wreak havoc on any links and backlinks (which will be explained later) you've strewn around the blogosphere.

If readers expect a link will take them to *Alex's Blog*, but they end up at the newly renamed *Cute K-9 Blog*, they'll think an error has occurred and will likely leave your site. Also, search engines will take a while to catch up to the switch, if they manage to at all. It's unlikely that searches for the established *Alex's Blog* will send people to the new *Cute K-9 Blog* without some fancy keyword shenanigans on Alex's part.

Smart Tip

If you choose to go by another name as a blogger, it's always a good idea to create a pseudonym that's memorable. Keep it simple, short, easy to remember, and witty if possible. Also, don't violate anyone else's copyrights or trademarks.

Tip...

Choosing a Pseudonym

Choosing a pseudonym for yourself isn't necessary, but some bloggers choose to do it, either for the added layer of online protection or for the plain fun of it. Who wouldn't want to create an online alter ego? If you decide to do this, it has its pros and

cons. For example, you can say things anonymously. However, by using a fake name or persona, it detracts from your credibility.

The sky's the limit when renaming yourself—just avoid choosing anything that's inappropriate or offensive. You wouldn't want to alienate any potential followers.

There are potential drawbacks to using your real name. First, if you run a blog that feeds off any aspect of your personal life, you run the risk of revealing too much personal information and making yourself vulnerable to identity thieves.

Second, if you write any sort of highly opinionated or "questionable" material, you may be shooting yourself in the foot when applying for your next job, beginning a new relationship, or even applying to schools. It's no secret that people often search the internet for the names of prospective employees, dates, and school applicants. If they come across your blog and read something that concerns them, you could be passed over.

The benefits of keeping your personal and professional blogging career separate could be worth it, but it all depends on your personal goals and your goals for the blog itself.

If you aren't publishing highly opinionated or questionable material on your blog and just seek to provide a valuable, thoughtful service for readers, using your real name is probably a good move, especially if you want to establish or build upon your real-world credibility as an expert in your field.

Write Like a Blogger

Unlike a company website or an annual report, for example, most blogs should be written in an easy-to-read, conversational style that your target audience will understand and relate to. Keep in mind, your blog may be read using a computer, interactive TV set, a tablet, or a smartphone.

Smart Tip

Set up a separate email address for your blog that's different from your personal or existing business email address. This will help guard your personal address from spam, stalkers, and the other security hazards.

Tip...

In other words, the size of the screen your readers will be using will vary greatly, so plan the layout, design, and content of your blog accordingly.

Here are some basic strategies to incorporate when writing text and creating content for a blog:

- Get right to the point and keep postings short. Remember, the attention span of your audience is very short.
- In your posts, answer questions related to whatever topics you're writing about, including: who, what, where, when, why, and how.
- Use a conversational and friendly tone, but be professional.
- Help to maintain a professional image by proofreading your work carefully before publishing it. Your posts should never contain spelling, punctuation, or grammar errors.
- Use short sentences that do not contain overly complicated words. Always keep your audience in mind, and write using language and vocabulary they'll understand.
- Keep paragraph lengths down to two or three sentences each, and utilize plenty of white space on the screen to avoid clutter and make the content look more presentable.
- Don't overuse different typetypes, like bold, italic, or underlined text. This can be distracting.
- Choose an easy-to-read font and make sure the text appears large enough so it's easy to view on any size screen. Avoid a font size that's smaller than 10 points.
- Make sure the color scheme you use is consistent with your image or brand, and that it too is easy on the eyes and not at all distracting.
- Whenever possible, use photos and graphics to reduce the amount of text in a blog entry and to help tell a story or demonstrate a key point.
- Don't ramble or include too much information within a single blog entry. If necessary, divide a topic into multiple parts.
- Put yourself in your target audience's shoes and make sure the blog content you're creating is interesting, well-organized, entertaining, informative, unique, and engaging.
- Maintain your branding and image. The content you publish as part of your blog should be consistent with everything else you're doing online and in the real world.
- Use bulleted or numbered lists within your posts to quickly convey information. Posts that focus on a Top 3, Top 5, or Top 10 list tend to be popular among audiences.

- Be sure to properly brand your blog using a logo, tag line, and other relevant content.

If you're producing a podcast or vlog, many of the same strategies can be used. In these situations, if you're using background music or sound effects, for example, make sure it's suitable for the content and not distracting. Likewise, be sure your audio or video content offers contact information that makes it easier for your audience to reach you, if applicable.

Again, keep the length of your podcast or vlog short, keeping in mind the short attention span of your target audience. Also, make sure the production quality is good enough to meet or exceed the audience's expectations and maintain your reputation and image.

Strategies for Producing Quality Videos (Vlogs)

When it comes to producing video-based content these days, you'll definitely want to utilize a camera capable of shooting high-definition (HD) quality video and take advantage of a camera that allows you to connect an external microphone so you can capture professional-quality audio. This is particularly important if you're creating video content on behalf of a business that needs to maintain a professional reputation.

As you'll learn by reading the book *Ultimate Guide to YouTube for Business* (by Jason R. Rich/Entrepreneur Press), there is no perfect formula for creating a successful YouTube video or vlog. What works for one company in order to reach a specific audience will not necessarily work for another.

However, if you analyze other successful videos on YouTube, particularly videos produced by your competitors or that target the same audience as you're striving to reach, you'll probably discover some common elements.

Many popular videos produced by small businesses typically have some or all of the following traits and production elements:

- The video is short and to the point. Keep your videos under three minutes in length.
- Within the first few seconds of the video, what the video is about and what it offers is quickly and clearly explained to the viewer.
- The video's call to action is incorporated into the video near the very beginning, and then repeated several times within the video, including near the very end. The call to action begins by stating what the reward is for the viewer who follows through and completes the call to action.

- The video somehow incorporates contact information for the person or organization that created it. This can be done using voiceovers, stated by the people featured within your video, using titles/captions, and/or using annotations or links embedded within the video itself.
- The video is targeted to a very specific audience and has a specific goal or objective.
- The content of the video is somehow unique and tries to set itself apart from the other videos on YouTube.
- The video offers information that the viewer perceives as useful, informative, entertaining, highly engaging, educational, or somehow directly relevant to what they're looking for, want, or need.
- In terms of production quality, the video is professional looking and offers good quality sound.
- The video uses some type of nondistracting background music.
- The video offers clearly defined and easy-to-understand information that the viewer doesn't have to wait too long to receive. The information is not buried in clutter or hidden by eye candy or bells and whistles that can be distracting or confusing to the viewer. For example, animated shot or scene transitions are not overused, and the background music is set at a proper level and is appropriate to the content.
- The look and messaging within the video is consistent with the company's brand and reputation.
- The title of the video is appropriate, descriptive, and directly to the point. When someone sees the video's title, they immediately have a good idea about what they can expect from the video. This is supported by a carefully worded description and accompanied by a carefully selected group of relevant tags and keywords.

With these common traits in mind, as you explore YouTube or vlogging for yourself, you'll easily discover very popular videos that follow none of these suggestions and that offer a truly unique or vastly different approach. Remember, there are no hardcore rules to follow, since video production is a highly creative endeavor. Focus on originality and ways you can communicate your core message as quickly and easily as possible to your intended audience.

Choose the Right Topics to Create Videos About

Once you have a general idea about what your overall goals are for YouTube, you've defined your audience, and have outlined your primary message, it's time to brainstorm ideas for individual videos. Start by determining what you want to say.

Then, based on your video production skills, equipment, and capabilities, consider the very best way to present that content.

For each potential idea you come up with, ask yourself these questions:

- Is my idea consistent with what I'm trying to accomplish on YouTube or with my vlog?
- What is the best approach to take with my idea within the video?
- Will my idea and my intended approach appeal to my intended audience?
- Do I have the skill, knowledge, and proper equipment to produce the video I'm envisioning, and do it well?
- Can the video be produced within my budget, without compromising production quality?
- How do I want the audience to react to the video? What will be the call to action?
- How do I anticipate the audience will actually react to the video?
- Will watching this video entice the viewer to watch other videos already published on my YouTube channel or vlog, to somehow make contact with me or my company, and/or place an order for my product/service, if applicable?
- While someone is watching the video, or immediately after it's over, will they be motivated to click on the "Like" button, give it a good rating, write and post a favorable comment, and/or share the video (or a link to it) with their online friends (via Facebook, Google+, or Twitter, for example)?
- Do the video, its message, its call to action, and its overall approach fit with what I'm already doing for myself or my company elsewhere in cyberspace, using Facebook, Google+, and/or Twitter, for example?

During the entire pre-production phase of the vlog, and then later when engaged in post production for your videos, go back and ask yourself these questions again and again to make sure you're remaining on target.

Why Many Videos Fail to Capture Its Intended Audience

Whether you're vlogging or incorporating short videos into your traditional blog, there are many reasons why videos fail to attract an audience. Some of the more common reasons include:

- They're poorly produced and boring to watch.
- The content of the video is unoriginal and doesn't stand out from the competition.

- It fails to cater to its target audience.
- The content is not entertaining, informative, or perceived as containing any type of valuable information—it does not address any type of work or need.
- It's too long and fails to hold the viewer's attention.
- The content doesn't properly take advantage of the visual aspect of multimedia, so it fails to keep the viewer's attention. If the viewer wants to just listen to content that doesn't utilize visuals, he/she could download or stream a podcast or audiobook, or simply turn on the radio. Consider ways to make your videos visually compelling.
- The video is given a nondescriptive title and has poorly chosen tags associated with it, which makes it hard or impossible to find using YouTube's Search feature or a search engine.
- The video isn't properly promoted after it's published on YouTube.
- Early on, the video receives “dislikes,” low ratings, and negative comments, which indicates to those who stumble upon it later that it's not worth watching.
- The producer or “star” of the video has a negative reputation online, which turns potential viewers off to what the video has to say.

Now that you know some of the more common reasons why many videos published on YouTube or the internet fail to attract an audience, you can more easily avoid these pitfalls by taking a different approach when presenting your unique content to your target audience.

As a vlogger, it's often very appealing to simply sit and stand in front of a video camera and start talking. This can be a quick and simple approach to take, but using a single “talking head” shot which consists of a closeup of you looking into the camera will get very boring for the viewer after 10 to 15 seconds. Try to use multiple shooting angles or incorporate some type of movement into your video to avoid overusing a “talking head” shot.

Choosing a Platform for Growth

Now that a few of the intangibles are out of the way, it's time to start planning the logistical aspects of getting your blog up and running. There are countless options when it comes to blog creation and hosting services, and to cover them all in one book isn't plausible, especially since new blogging services and technologies are constantly being introduced.

Let YouTube Host Your Videos . . . There Are Major Benefits

If you're utilizing video within a traditional blog, or vlogging, strongly consider having your videos hosted by YouTube and creating your own YouTube channel for yourself or your business.

There are many benefits to doing this. For example, YouTube offers a wide range of free, online-based tools for branding a YouTube channel and then editing and promoting your videos.

Plus, because YouTube is owned by Google, your video (vlog) can automatically be listed within the Google and YouTube search engines, which are the two most popular search engines in the world. This typically happens within hours (not days or weeks) after a new video is published on YouTube.

Listings for your individual videos within Google and YouTube's search engines will help to dramatically improve the SEO (search engine optimization) for your website, blog, vlogs, and/or videos.

Chapter 2 covers the most popular blogging options, including Blogger.com, WordPress.com, and TypePad.com, plus touches on Twitter.com, Facebook.com, YouTube.com, Tumblr.com, and Instagram.com, for example.

First, let's look at the difference between blogging software and a blog hosting service.

Hosted Blogging Services vs. Installed Server Applications

There are two main types of blogging platforms: hosted services and server applications. Both perform basically the same task of publishing a blog. Chances are, as you get started, any option you choose will meet your needs for creating a basic, straightforward, traditional, text-based blog. However, if you want to add specialized functionality, interactivity, or unique features to your blog, you'll want to pay careful attention to what's offered by each type of service or software product.

There are significant technological differences between hosted blogging services and installed server applications. The method you choose will have a significant impact on how you run your blog in the future, as well as on your operational costs.

If you're not at all techno-savvy, the easiest and fastest way to launch a blog is to use a free blog hosting service, such as Blogger.com, WordPress.com, or even Facebook. When you use one of these services, all of the tools needed are online-based, and absolutely no programming is required. You simply choose a template for your blog and then add the text, photos, video clips, graphics, and/or other multimedia content into your posts using the keyboard or using a drag-and-drop or cut-and-paste interface.

Using a hosted blogging service, you can establish your blog and publish your first blog post in well under an hour (or however long it takes to compose the blog entry). All you need is a computer, tablet, smartphone, or internet-enabled device that has a web browser installed. If you're using a smartphone or tablet, such as an iPhone or iPad, for example, many of the popular blog hosting services (including WordPress.com and Blogger.com) offer free specialized apps that allow you to create and manage your blog with those devices. Thus, you can work on your blog from virtually anywhere.

Hosted Blogging Services

A hosted blogging service is an entirely web-based option for publishing a blog. All aspects of your blog's creation, publishing, and management are done online, using online-based tools. All you need is access to the web from any standard internet browser (or a specialized app on your tablet or smartphone).

All your interactions with the blogging service, including setting up and the posting of new entries to your own blog, is done through the blogging service's website. There's nothing to download or install, no programming is required, and you can begin blogging immediately. This is also a very low-cost option. In fact, many of the hosted blogging services are free of charge.

To first establish your blog, you'll need to choose a blog hosting service, and then register with that service. This process takes no more than a few minutes. To register initially, you'll need to supply basic information about yourself, including your name and email address.

Once registered, you're given a web address URL for your blog. Your blog's address, at least initially, will be some extension of the blogging service's address. Some services allow you to choose this extension, and some assign it to you. Your new blog's address could take any of several different formats.

To make things easy for your followers, ultimately what you'll want to do is register an easy-to-remember domain name, and then forward it to your assigned blog address.

For casual bloggers, the provided address will usually suffice, but you can register your own custom domain name for under \$15 per year using a service like GoDaddy (www.godaddy.com). Once you register a domain name, you can forward the registered

URL to any website address, such as the one provided to you by your blog hosting service.

The benefit of using a custom domain name is that you can advertise your own easy-to-remember and more professional domain name, which would automatically redirect visitors to your blog.

For example, when the blog “Jason Rich’s Featured App of the Week” was registered with the WordPress.com service, it was assigned the URL `http://featuredappoftheweek.wordpress.com`. To make things easier for the blog’s audience, the URL “`www.FeaturedAppOfTheWeek.com`” was registered using GoDaddy.com and forwarded to the appropriate place. Now, someone who wants to access this blog can simply enter `www.FeaturedAppOfTheWeek` into their browser, as opposed to a more complex or confusing URL.

Many of the popular blogging services have multiple levels of service, ranging from a basic, free service to a more expensive, fully featured one. As your blog outgrows the basic level of service, your monthly fees may increase. The good news is the top level of service isn’t very expensive (usually less than \$30 per month).

For a traditional, text-based blog, a free service is usually more than adequate for most bloggers. At the same time, producing and hosting a podcast is also free, as is creating your own YouTube channel, which can be used to showcase your YouTube videos (vlogs).

In the past, one of the main disadvantages to hosted blogging services was the limited ability to truly customize your blog. These services use prefab templates that a blogger can choose from and then customize. However, with all the recent technologies, the services still rely on templates, but each is extremely customizable from a visual standpoint. The only potential limitation is if you want to add features and functionality to your blog that are unusual or that the service doesn’t support.

Many third parties now offer widgets that add functionality to blogs hosted by specific blog hosting services, such as Blogger.com or WordPress.com. While a template provides a design that the blogger can then customize, adding widgets to a blog gives it added functionality, such as the ability to display a slide show, automatically publish news headlines, or adding a “Share” button to a blog entry.

Smart Tip



Ultimately, your goal as a blogger should be to get your readers to subscribe to your blog. This way, they can receive automatic emails when you publish new content, or the RSS reader they use will automatically download your blog’s content and make it available to the reader without them having to manually visit the blog by entering a URL into their browser each time. The ability to add a “Subscribe” button to your blog is built into many blogging services and platforms, or it can easily be added using a plug-in or widget.

Dollar Stretcher

Most domain name registrars offer a discount on registration fees if you purchase more than one year at a time. If you're sure you would like the selected domain for a while, buy two, three, or four years upfront to save money.

It's also possible to register multiple domain names and have them all forward to the same blog. This can be useful for marketing purposes or to help you promote your blog to specific audiences.



If you use a hosted blogging service and their servers go down for any amount of time, you're left largely without recourse (with the major blogging services, however, this is a very rare occurrence). If you sign on with an established and reputable service, this shouldn't be a large concern for you, as they no doubt have a robust network and highly skilled technicians, plus backups. But if you host your own blogging application or use a separate web host, you could be required to take a more active role in getting the site back online. (This might be more responsibility than you want or need initially, unless you're creating a blog for a well-established company.)

Another potential drawback of hosted blogging services is that your blog will be on a server with thousands of other blogs. If one of those blogs has a huge traffic spike, the server's system resources (memory, processor, bandwidth) could potentially be eaten up by the popular blog, taking resources away from your blog and slowing down service for your readers. Again, if you use one of the major blogging services, this won't be an issue.

When you're shopping for a hosted blogging service, in addition to the concerns already listed, also consider the size and reputation of the service. Don't try to save a few bucks per month by going with a small and unknown service. Stick with names you know and can trust. Blogger.com, for example, is owned and operated by Google.

The main advantages to hosted blogging services are that they're all easy to set up, have a relatively low cost of entry (often free), they provide a nice selection of features, and tech support is readily available. These services also typically offer hundreds of different design templates, plus many widgets you can add to customize the look and functionality of your blog easily—with no programming required.

If you don't have a website design or technical background, and you just want to focus on creating and publishing a blog,

Smart Tip

Many blogging services offer free or low-cost plans. Try out a few before you select just one. Your time and money will be well-spent. Find blogs you particularly like or that have the look, functionality, and features you want for your blog, and determine what service is used to host each of them.

Tip...

Need More Technical Expertise? Seek Out Professional Help

Installing a blogging application on a web server requires some familiarity with FTP, file permissions, and directory structure. It can be daunting, but not impossible, for those unfamiliar with these concepts to initially set up and then properly run the application.

If you opt to take this route, which is common if your company already hosts a website and you want to add a blog to the existing website, consider hiring a freelance website designer/programmer to help you initially establish and publish the blog. Once it's set up, updating the blog with new posts is always a straightforward process that even a non-tech-savvy person can handle.

You can find and hire a reputable and skilled website designer/programmer from a service like eLance (www.elance.com). This can be done for as little as \$200 to \$300 to get you started.

using one of the blog services described within Chapter 2, for example, is definitely your best bet.

Installed Server Applications

If you'll be operating a blog on behalf of a company, and you know the blog will receive a significant level of traffic, or if you must have specific features and functionality within the blog that the traditional blog services don't offer, then using an installed server application for your blog is probably the right way to go, assuming you have the knowledge and resources to use it.

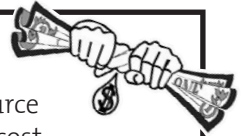
An installed server application is a program that you, the user, install on your own web server or web host account. Available blogging server applications range in size and quality from small hobbyist scripts to large commercial applications. There are free, open-source applications, as well as expensive, proprietary ones.

Experiment with the open-source software blogging applications first, as these don't cost anything to use. You'll probably discover that many of them are better quality than their commercial counterparts.

Running your own blogging application allows for infinite control over your blog, its design, and its overall functionality and performance. If you're familiar with the

code in which the application was written, there's nothing stopping you from making any changes you deem necessary. Don't let the idea of tinkering in code scare you away from this option; most users never find it necessary because most of these applications are well-polished and easy-to-use. Plus, you can always hire a freelance programmer/website designer from a service such as elance.com to help you customize your blog's programming, if you deem it absolutely necessary. Information about downloading and installing a few of these applications are covered within Chapter 2.

Dollar Stretcher



Using free, open-source software and a low-cost web host offers an inexpensive blog setup that has plenty of room to grow and customize in the future.

The main benefit of using an installed application is that you'll enjoy more control over every aspect of running your blog. The web server will be under your control (either humming along in your basement or through your web hosting provider), as well as the application, advertising integration, and system backups.

One major drawback to this method is that because you have all the control, you also have all of the responsibility. If the server goes down, it will be up to you to fix it (unless you're using a web hosting provider, who can help you with outages). If the blogging application won't load properly, it will be up to you to fix it. And if the advertising doesn't load properly, it will be up to you to make nice with your sponsors . . . and fix it. Again, this option is for people with more technical backgrounds, or who need very specialized functionality in conjunction with their blog.

You'll need to register a domain name if you choose this method of running a blog (it's not an option), and you'll likely need to pay monthly hosting fees, based on storage space and bandwidth requirements. This method may be more expensive in the beginning, but as your blog grows, your expenses will probably not grow with it. So, down the road, as your blog-related advertising or merchandising revenue rises, your profits most likely won't be eaten up by higher service fees.

Suitability for Your Content

When researching the various blogging platforms, be sure to consider your intended content. In terms of storage, functionality, and bandwidth, for example, your needs will be vastly different if you'll be operating a traditional text-based blog versus publishing podcasts or videos.

All the traffic analysis and ad network integration in the world won't help you if the service doesn't allow you to post photos on your photo blog. The first thing to look

for in a blogging service or application is the ability to handle the content you wish to include within your blog.

In some cases, a blog is comprised simply of text, hyperlinks, and photos. To meet the needs of this type of blog, any blog service you choose will be able to handle all the content you need. But as the blogging phenomenon has expanded, so have the requirements of the bloggers. To keep up with the competition, you may need your blog to play audio clips, videos, Flash animations, or have some level of interactivity. Be sure to check out the feature lists of each blog platform.

Advertising Capacity

Depending on the goals of your blog, you may choose to generate revenue from it by displaying ads from other companies. Most of the blogging services have built-in advertising capabilities, plus the ability to quickly integrate Google AdSense ads or other forms of display or search advertising ads (which will be explained in Chapter 4).

This functionality makes generating revenue by displaying ads relatively easy, assuming your blog receives significant traffic and the displayed ads interest your blog's audience. Popular ad networks, such as Google's AdSense, sometimes affiliate themselves with a particular blogging service to enable users of that service to install their ads in a few steps.

Once your blog begins drawing serious traffic, you may outgrow Google AdSense advertising, and depending on the blog service you ultimately use, incorporating other outside ad networks may not be allowed or technically possible.

There may come a time in your blogging life when you'll want to solicit individual advertisers and/or belong to multiple ad networks. Therefore, you should find a blogging service that not only makes advertising easy in the beginning but also allows for expansion. Ask the blog service providers if they lock you into a single ad network and if they allow access to your blog's template code for more ad integration later.

Advertising integration is covered in more detail within Chapters 2 and 4.



Beware!

Some blogging services don't allow advertising by bloggers. Don't assume that your ads are allowed. Check first before registering with a blog hosting service.

Future Growth

Blogging trends change quickly and new technologies are constantly being introduced. Thus your needs as a blogger

will evolve. For example, when blogs first started to become popular, they were read primarily on computer screens. Today, many people access blogs, podcasts, and vlogs from wireless mobile devices, such as tablets and smartphones. Make sure your blog accommodates these technologies by auto-formatting content on smaller screens, for example.

Plan on the audience for your blog growing over time, which means greater need for storage space and bandwidth. If you choose to use a blog service, it may have traffic and storage maximums—especially for its free services. You may find that as you grow, so will the fees for maintaining your blog, which may or may not be a deciding factor for you. Again, you'll want to consider the purpose of your blog, the functionality you'd like to incorporate, your long-term goals, and your intended audience before choosing a blog hosting service.

At the most basic level for a traditional blog, your blogging service will need to provide archiving, visitor comments, and easy-to-use posting and design tools. Archiving, for example, is a key feature to consider. You'll need the ability to archive all your posts so your readers can access anything you've written since the start of the blog. This archiving should be accessible using keyword searches, posted blog entry listings, and via hyperlinks, for example.

If you choose to host your own blogging software, archiving should be built into any application you choose so that won't be as much of a problem. However, your web host may have traffic and storage restrictions. There are so many web hosts on the internet, finding a cheap and reliable host for your blog shouldn't be too difficult, provided you do your pre-planning and research to determine your needs.

Customization

As your blog grows and you become more familiar with the platform and subject you've chosen, you'll no doubt begin to fine-tune the whole operation for better speed, performance, search engine ratings, and functionality. If you're using a hosted blogging service, the amount of tinkering you're allowed to do may be somewhat limited.

Understandably, if the blogging service wants its service to remain fast and reliable, it can't allow all its customers access to the site's code and allow them to tinker with it. Some sites do allow bloggers access to their blog template source code, which provides for enough customization to satisfy the average blogger. If, however, you're the type of person who likes to bury your hands in the guts of an engine to



Beware!

Customizing a blog's application code should only be undertaken by those who understand the programming language in which the application was written, and only if the application's user license allows.

squeeze out the last little bit of horsepower, you may not be satisfied with the template customization restrictions imposed by many blogging services. As you do your research, ask about customization.

If you know already that you can't live with customization restrictions, your best bet is to use a blogging application on a separate web hosting account. There are plenty of blogging applications that allow

bloggers to tinker to no end. Some make it easy, with intricate configuration menus, and some require diving into the actual code. If you have no familiarity with the code in which the application was written, it's best to keep out of it. Learn the code somewhere else (or hire a programmer), and then, when you're more comfortable with the system, take your shot.

Bringing On Staff or Contributors

Like any business, operating a blog has many responsibilities and tasks involved, above and beyond creating and publishing blog entries and content. In addition to writing or producing the actual blog, you'll need to manage the integrated advertising displayed within the blog (if applicable), handle the blog's marketing and promotion, oversee the blog's business-related accounting and bookkeeping, and manage the business relationships with your hosting service and related vendors.

Sure, blogging is a fun business, but it's still a very real business, and if its goal is to generate an income, it needs to be treated like a serious business (at least behind the scenes). Likewise, if a blog is being used in conjunction with your existing business, it needs to be treated like a business tool—not a hobby.

As your blog grows, it may become too big of a project for just one person to handle all the required responsibilities. When getting started, your main goal should be to run a reliable blog, while planning the business's structure for growth. You shouldn't assume

Smart Tip

Plan to hire help. If you think of your blog as a business, not as a hobby, you should probably plan to have help, at least in the form of freelancers, if not part-time or full-time employees.

Tip...

that you can do everything the business needs for as long as the business needs it.

Depending on your blog's goal and audience, it may need to be updated every single day, or several times throughout the day. Are you planning a life wherein you never get a vacation, or even a weekend off?

Many blogging services offer now the ability to create blog entries and then pre-determine exactly when each entry will be published. Thus, if you have a vacation planned, you can write multiple blog entries ahead of time and arrange for them to automatically be posted, one at a time, based on your blog's publishing schedule.

In the beginning, you'll likely be able to do everything yourself. But there may come a point when you simply can't do everything you need to do in the course of the day. In addition to researching and writing posts for your blog, you'll also need to solicit advertisers, manage advertising networks, process merchandise orders, pack and ship orders, e-mail readers, and manage the day-to-day operations of the business, as well as the smooth operation of your blog.

As your business grows, taking care of all the peripheral work that building a successful blog requires also becomes your responsibility. Before you become overwhelmed by the amount of work required to keep your successful blog going (once it has a huge following and is generating revenue for you, if that's its goal), or if you notice that the quality of your posts is beginning to suffer because you're too busy with the "back office" part of your blog business, it is time to hire help.

Unfortunately, many business owners must reach a point of absolute frenzy before they realize the need to hire help. Essentially, in order to take on a full-time employee, the business owner often must overload himself with the work of two (or more) people just to build the venture to the point that it can support another salary. Don't wait for that point if you can avoid it.

Luckily, when just starting out, you likely won't need full-time help. A person or two, for a few hours a week, will significantly lighten your load and allow you to focus on delivering quality content to your readers. Consider hiring college interns or paid freelancers to pick up the slack when their help is needed.

Smart Tip

Your blog will benefit from a business plan. Sample business plans are available online from the SBA. Visit www.sba.gov for more information. Business Plan Pro from Palo Alto Software (www.businessplanpro.com) is one of the most powerful business plan creation tools on the market. It's priced starting at \$99.95 for the basic edition or \$159.95 for the "Premiere" edition. This software is well worth the investment if you need to create a detailed, well-organized, and highly professional business plan.

Tip...

Your Growth Plan

Before you even begin blogging, it's important to have a detailed growth plan. This plan should consist of the short- and long-term goals for your blog and for your overall business, as well as a time frame in which to achieve each goal. You'll also want to determine what type of specialized help you'll need along the way, whether it's from a graphic designer, professional photographer, editor, website designer, programmer, bookkeeper, advertising sales representative, chat room monitor, or an experienced writer/journalist (copywriter).

Business Goals

Specific goals for a blogging business are unique to every blogger. Some prefer to blog in their spare time for extra cash, while others have a full-time career path in mind. Other bloggers aim for world domination. When deciding your goals, take into account the level of intricacy you're prepared to deal with and the amount of time you want to spend. Once again consider your passion for the project and what realistic expectations you have for it.

A small blog with one advertising network is obviously less complicated and time-consuming to deal with than managing a huge blog with private sponsors, three ad networks, and branded T-shirts and coffee mugs for sale.

Many bloggers are able to generate a nice income by selling customized shirts and merchandise based around their blog's name, theme, or subject matter. Just a few of the companies that can help make the creation and selling of merchandise from your blog easier are District Lines (www.districtlines.com), BigCartel (<http://bigcartel.com>), and CafePress (www.cafepress.com). We'll talk more about this viable method of generating revenue from your blog later.

Your Time Frame

Develop a reasonable and conservative time frame in which you expect to achieve each of your goals. It usually makes sense to take your biggest and most ambitious goals and divide them up into a series of smaller, more achievable goals, each with its own deadline. Achieving five small goals, one at a time, is easier and much less daunting than trying to tackle a single major goal.

If you've planned a modest blog, aim for achieving your desired readership levels in six months to a year, but be sure to keep your expectations realistic, based on your ability to market your blog and who your intended audience will be.

If you've considerably more ambitious goals, achieving your desired level of readership could take anywhere from one to four years. Make sure you have the patience to be persistent and stay on track over the long term, or don't get started at all.

Some blogs catch on with an audience very quickly and require limited marketing and promotion, thanks to overwhelming word-of-mouth or if the blog receives national publicity, for example. But you should not count on that level of success, at least right away. Realistically, it will take considerable time for your readership to grow.

Smart Tip

If you haven't reached your goal within two to three years, or your audience has stopped growing for several months in a row, re-evaluate your marketing strategies, your overall approach, and how you've defined your target audience.

Make sure your goals are realistic. When you first launch a blog, it could take weeks or months (possibly years) to build up a significant audience, even if you do everything right from day one.

Inviting Other People to Contribute to Your Blog

You may begin to feel swamped by the responsibility of writing several blog posts per day while at the same time interacting with your blog's readers and followers. If you think that your time would be better spent working on other aspects of the business, consider hiring or enlisting the help of blog contributors.

The best place to find such help is among your readership. The people who visit your blog regularly have already displayed a sincere interest in your content. There are probably a few people in your audience who would love a chance to begin writing for their favorite blog. There's a thrill in being a reader-turned-poster; most readers would jump at the chance to post to the blog, even without pay.

If you're operating a company blog, get your coworkers or company executives involved. For example, have individuals from various departments within your company serve as guest bloggers in order to provide your audience with content that's published from slightly different perspectives.

When choosing a contributor, make sure:

- They're passionate about the blog's topic.
- They're extremely knowledgeable about the blog's topic.
- They're credible and can write with authority.
- They truly understand and identify with your blog's target audience.
- They have the ability to write and edit their own work and create professional quality content.

- They're creative and able to generate content that's original, engaging, and of interest to your target audience.
- They'll work within a budget you can afford to pay. Hiring a professional writer will mean paying them per word or per entry for their work. The quality will most likely be top-notch, but if you want to hire a highly skilled professional writer to contribute to your blog, you'll need to pay wages equivalent to a newspaper, magazine or other media outlets. This often means paying between \$.25 and \$1 per word.



Beware!

If your audience has come to enjoy your work as a blogger, don't step back from posting entirely, or your business plan could backfire. Be sure to watch the posted material from other writers closely, and act as an editor when necessary.

The drawback to finding volunteer bloggers to contribute to your blog is finding people who are reliable and able to create content that's up to par. Plus, you'll often have a hard time imposing quotas on volunteer help. Asking for daily content from volunteers is requesting a lot. And if you decide that the volunteer you've enlisted is not producing the quality of content that you would like, you'll have a harder time asking that person to stop. Paying contributors even a small stipend makes it easier to set a minimum number of posts per day, and to fire posters that don't produce quality.

Once you start bringing in contributors to your blog, plan to serve as editor-in-chief for any bloggers you hire. You can't take the risk of hiring help without maintaining full editorial control. Your blog could suffer heavily from an incompetent, unreliable, or uninformed blogger. Until you can trust that a certain person will reliably produce worthy content for you, insist that everything he or she posts passes through you first. This will create more work for you in the short term, as you'll be writing your own posts while editing others, but it will pay off in the long run.

If you're able to find several reliable contributors—enough to cover your daily posting duties—you could conceivably get out of posting to your blog altogether and focus on finding more readers, advertisers, and therefore, profits. That is, if that's the part of the blogging business you like best. Of course, you could also hire people to handle these nonblogging-related business activities and focus simply on being a blogger.

Smart Tip

Most successful blogs somehow utilize Facebook, Twitter, and other online social networking sites as promotional and audience-building tools. Highly targeted paid online advertising can also be used as a quick yet inexpensive way to build an audience. We'll explore these options within Chapter 3.

Tip...

Don't Forget About Building Your Audience

For the majority of bloggers, the biggest and most time-consuming challenge is building and maintaining an audience. Without an audience that's constantly growing, you won't be able to generate

revenue from your blog or achieve any of its other objectives.

So in addition to pre-planning how you'll operate your business and create and publish your blog on an ongoing basis, put a lot of thought and consideration into how you'll market and promote your blog initially and on an ongoing basis. Without an extremely strong, innovative, and well-developed marketing and promotional plan, your blog is almost guaranteed to fail.

Realistically, if you want to have a successful blog, you must become an expert at marketing and promotions and truly understand who your target audience is and how to reach those people with appropriate content starting from day one. Later in this book we'll discuss specific marketing and promotional strategies, but if you're not willing to invest the time, effort, and money to do this properly, you will not be able to generate the audience you want or need for your blog.

Planning Wrap-Up

Take as long as you need to effectively plan your blog. There's no better time to tinker and test your business idea than before

Smart Tip

One of the biggest expenses you'll have as a blog operator is promoting and marketing your blog in order to build and maintain your audience. This is a time-consuming process that will most likely cost money and require you to develop a high level of expertise in marketing and promotions. There are no shortcuts. You'll need to market and promote your blog heavily and on an ongoing basis by taking a multifaceted approach that perfectly targets your intended audience.

Tip...

you get started. After launch, you'll have committed your time and money to one path or another, so try to be sure when heading into the venture that it's the right one.

Review your objectives once everything is underway, and make sure you've built a solid plan for growth. If you know someone with blogging experience, consider having her or him review your plan and offer guidance as a mentor. Before actually getting started with your blog, make sure you've properly considered every aspect of the creative and business aspects of it. If you've done your job well, you'll have built a solid foundation from which your blog and business can and will grow.

Now that we've discussed the foundation required for starting a blog, let's learn more about what's required to actually create and publish a blog. That's the focus of Chapter 2.

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